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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANJUL 000258

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DAKAR PLS PASS ODC, DAO, AND RAO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [POINS](#) [SG](#) [GA](#)  
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: A GESTURE TO SENEGAL

REF: BANJUL 257 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SENEGALESE OFFICIALS PARDONED  
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¶1. (C) Reftel reports the Gambian court's May 16 conviction and sentencing to 18-month prison sentences of five Senegalese customs officials. The following day, May 17, the GOTG announced President Yayha Jammeh's decision to pardon the five, who were immediately released and handed over to the Senegalese Ambassador. The word among our contacts is that Jammeh acted in response to a warning from Dakar that the five officials' incarceration was unacceptable and would trigger some sort of retaliation, e.g. a much-rumored Senegalese move to close the border with The Gambia.

BUT MEDIA ATTACK CONTINUES  
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¶2. (SBU) At the same time, the pro-GOTG journal, the Daily Observer, continues to feature anti-Senegalese material. Following its May 17 report of a recent meeting in Dakar of anti-GOTG dissidents and GOS Interior Ministry officials as part of alleged plotting to destabilize the GOTG (reftel), the paper ran an editorial May 18 accusing Dakar of bullying and ignoring the GOTG's efforts at good neighborliness. The editorial portrayed the pardon of the five convicted Senegalese officials as the latest gesture to promote good ties. The commentary, citing the alleged meeting of dissidents and GOS officials, concluded with an appeal to Dakar to reciprocate and refrain from "short-sighted and ill-conceived policies of external interference and national destabilization" toward The Gambia.

COMMENT  
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¶3. (C) Our initial reaction to Jammeh's decision to pardon is that it represents a welcome first step by him to step back from the brink of a major confrontation with Dakar and avoid the latter's retaliation, in the form of a border closure or otherwise. Our sense was that the trial of the five Senegalese was based on flimsy evidence and designed primarily as a gesture of defiance toward the GOS. It remains to be seen whether Jammeh will follow up with further moves to ease tensions, e.g. adopting a more cooperative posture on the Casamance dossier. The May 18 Daily Observer editorial, though, serves as a reminder of the Gambians' long-standing complaint of Senegalese harboring of anti-Jammeh elements bent on overthrowing him. END COMMENT

